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Kirkbride, Franklin Butler

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Some Random Remarks on the Rights, Duties, and Opportunities of Managers of State Institutions

A paper read at the Thirteenth New York State Conference of
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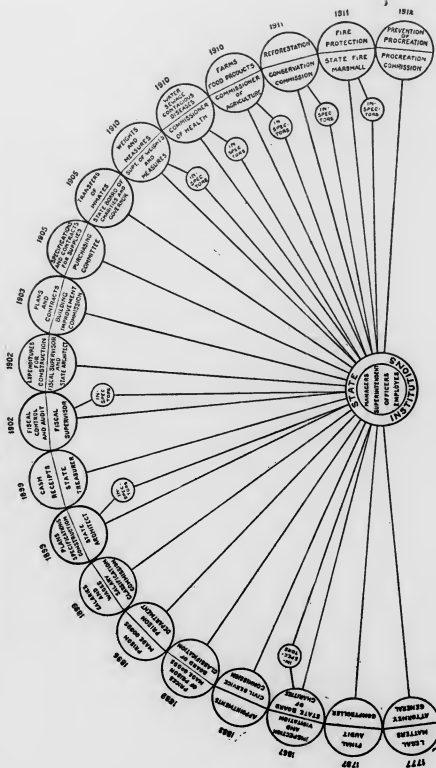
by

Franklin B. Kirkbride

Secretary of the Board of Managers of Letchworth Village

Sent out with the compliments of George H. Paine, Philadelphia, Pa.

CHART ILLUSTRATING SYSTEM OF CONTROL OF THE STATE CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS
CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED



Some Random Remarks on the Rights, Duties, and Opportunities of Managers of State Institutions

by

Franklin B. Kirkbride

Secretary of the Board of Managers of Letchworth Village

It is an old adage that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. I do not want you to think for a moment that because I am about to point out some difficulties from the standpoint of the manager I do not realize the difficulties which confront those in the various departments of the state government who come in contact with the managers and the institutions. I know that, after all, managers are human beings; that we are far from perfect; that we ought to be bigger in our viewpoint; that we should have a better sense of proportion; that we ought to know more about the institutions which we are supposed to manage; and that we should see more clearly the possibilities and opportunities before us.

The managers of the State Charitable and Reformatory Institutions of New York are a body of one hundred and forty men and women. Individually we count for little; collectively we can do an enormous amount to form and direct public opinion. I shall point out, as I have said, as clearly as I can some of the difficulties which we are facing. In the discussion which will follow this paper, I hope my friends who view these problems from a different angle will be equally frank in telling where they think we fail to realize the ideal of cooperation.

My first knowledge of the New York state institutions came from the outside, and was obtained while I was serving on a commission to select a site for Letchworth Village.

In connection with that work it was necessary to make a rather careful investigation not only of the sites, but also of the organization, methods, and management of the institutions already existing. As a result of those investigations it first appeared that it was the right of the manager to ruffle the sensitive feelings of the State Board of Charities; his duty to bait the Fiscal Supervisor; and his greatest opportunity to circumvent the rulings of the Comptroller. On further investigation of the constitution and laws of the state, however, I found duties resting upon the manager, opportunities open to him, and rights conferred upon him which, if less enjoyable from a sporting standpoint, were more heavily fraught with possibilities than those prerogatives which I found were such cherished possessions.

One discovery made about that time has never ceased to make me wonder. It was months before I dared even breathe my discovery, but the more I studied the revised statutes the more clearly I grasped the significance of the new and Machiavellian principle which "without haste, but without rest," had been woven into our statute law.

It is written "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." Thou canst not serve two masters must no longer be true, however, for a thou shalt serve commandment has by legislative enactment been substituted, decreeing that not one master, nor even two, but as many masters shall be served as a patient and long-suffering body of earnest and submissive managers is capable of enduring.

Let us trace the history of the insidious introduction of this new principle.

Until 1883 there was virtual autonomy at the institutions in spite of the supervision of the Attorney General, the Comptroller, and the State Board of Charities. But in that year the change began which has continued ever since, until today the law reads, "Thou shalt serve these masters and such others as in the fulness of time and the wisdom of

the Governor, the Senate, and the General Assembly shall be added unto you," to wit:

1777	regarding law	Attorney General
1797	" final audit	Comptroller
1867	" inspection and visitation	State Board of Charities
1883	" appointments	Civil Service Commission
1889	" prices of prison made goods	Board of Classification
1896	" prison made goods	Prison Department
1899	" salaries and wages	Salary Classification Commission
1899	" plans, specifications and construction	State Architect
1899	" cash receipts	State Treasurer
1902	" fiscal control and audit	Fiscal Supervisor
1902	" expenditures for construction	Fiscal Supervisor and State Architect
1903	" plans and contracts	Building Improvement Commission
1905	" specifications and contracts for supplies	Purchasing Committee
1905	" transfers of inmates	State Board of Charities and Governor
1910	" weights and measures	Superintendent of Weights and Measures
1910	" water, sewage, and contagious diseases	Commissioner of Health
1910	" farms and food products	Commissioner of Agriculture
1911	" reforestation	Conservation Commission
1911	" fire protection	State Fire Marshal
1912	" prevention of procreation	Procreation Commission

And these are the names of eight of the masters to whom the law says, send men to spy out the land, and see the institutions, what they are, and the people that dwelleth in them, whether they be strong or weak, few or many:

The State Board of Charities
 The State Architect
 The Fiscal Supervisor
 The Superintendent of Weights and Measures

The Commissioner of Health
 The Commissioner of Agriculture
 The Conservation Commission
 The State Fire Marshal

The great success of this multiple system of control and inspection in stifling unseemly enthusiasm, in weakening annoying initiative, in curbing uncomfortable ideas, and in rendering docile even the most unruly manager, is at last apparent to all.

So much for the law, which in passing I commend to the attention of every manager, as an accurate knowledge is the only basis for comfortable relations between the departments in Albany, charged with the duty of enforcing the law, and the managers, upon whom devolves the duty of directing the policy and management of their respective institutions.

Dr. S. Weir Mitchell in the introduction to a little handbook of Suggestions to Hospital and Asylum Visitors, by Dr. John S. Billings and Dr. Henry M. Hurd,—a book now out of print, but which should be in the hands of every hospital manager and visitor—says, "Boards of managers are chosen out of the every-day life of commerce and professions other than that of medicine. The members are presumed to study results into which enter questions of cooking, dietetics, ventilation, medical and surgical cleanliness, which involves disinfection, and many other matters exacting careful attention, and only to be thoroughly understood after years of training."

As the position of manager is an unpaid one, and as it is of sufficient importance to be subject to confirmation by the Senate, it follows that the manager has, or should have, more than the average intelligence. But intelligence alone, without special knowledge, does not equip the manager for the most successful performance of his duties. He must be trained to see not only petty details, but also the larger problems of organization, discipline, and management. And

to the superintendent, more than to anyone else, falls the responsibility of opening the manager's eyes so that he may perceive and realize the possibilities before him.

Now a few words as to the rights of managers. It was long considered the right of a manager to visit his institution at any hour of the day or the night, to be met at the station by the best rig on the place, and to be served with the brands of whiskey and cigars furnished at the most exclusive metropolitan clubs. It was his right also to go through the institution from one end to the other followed by the superintendent, the matron, the chief engineer, and a retinue of stenographers and attendants, who fervently said amen to all suggestions that he made. Again, it was his inalienable right to address women's clubs, church sociables, and similar organizations, attired in a Prince Albert suit, and to exhort his eager hearers to use their influence to induce the local senator and assemblyman to vote money for the relief of the downtrodden, the widow, and the orphan.

Passing from these rights, so deeply satisfying to a manager's vanity, let me mention two rights of very great importance, but not always clearly understood—the right of the manager to break every precedent in critical situations, and the right to be notified and consulted, by the superintendent, about everything that occurs that is out of the ordinary.

So far we have dealt with the rights; now let us consider the duties. One of the first duties of a manager is to get the superintendent to understand and accept the composite opinion of the Board rather than the opinions of the individual members. The superintendent's judgment would thus be unbiased and undue influence be avoided. In order that the composite opinion of the Board should be one worthy to be understood and accepted, however, the individual managers must be men of three dimensions; men, as well, of diversified activities.

Then a manager should be intelligent enough to know what he wants regarding his institution. He should know

how he wants the institution run, and then tell his superintendent to run it, remembering that the superintendent, and he alone, is responsible for the performance of this duty, and should be held strictly accountable for results. But a manager should know and discuss with his superintendent what he is doing and why he is doing it. He should always know whether his superintendent deserves criticism. Let him beware, however, about issuing hard and fast rules to the superintendent, because then it becomes impossible to criticize him.

A manager's concern is with big things, with the organization as a whole. The matter of appropriations, for instance, is distinctively a manager's duty. And as a preparation for this duty he should be thoroughly familiar with the political situation, comprehending that one of his chief duties is to familiarize himself with obstacles, not only here, but along every line of his obligation.

But although a manager's chief duty is with big things, such as the settling of all general principles, he should be familiar, to a certain extent, with microscopic details, understanding at the same time that their execution is to be left to the superintendent, for an institution is like a ship and can have but one captain.

Every manager should be impressed with the enormous importance of avoiding the creation of artificial wants, for the reason that it takes a vast amount of time to guard against these wants, once created.

All plans for buildings should be worked out by the superintendent, but a manager should be so well acquainted with the buildings that his criticism and suggestions may be of dynamic value to his superintendent.

Every manager has a sacred duty to see that the purpose of his institution is carried out. This is not saying that a manager shall not suggest adding to or taking from, but it is saying that the purpose of the institution shall be conserved, particularly regarding construction, nursing, instruction, and all the details of administration.

One of the most important duties of a manager is to become familiar with the difficulties under which the institution labors, and then to simplify them. Let us take an example. We all agree upon the merit system as a fundamental principle, but in the administration of the Civil Service law in this state there are serious defects. Satisfactory as it may be in those departments where previous experience is not necessary and where personality is not at a premium, the law as now administered is not well adapted to our institutions.

The management of a successful railroad and an institution should differ but little. The employes of the railroad start on the lowest rung. They familiarize themselves with the details of the departments in which they are placed. They are advanced according to actual worth: the fireman eventually becoming the master mechanic; the brakeman, the superintendent of traffic; the clerk, the auditor—rising by sheer worth. In this way, and in no other, can a successful business be conducted, whether it is a railroad or an institution.

The state, through its present Civil Service rules, often takes quite the opposite plan. It places, for instance, the women attendants in the non-competitive class, because they cannot be secured in the competitive at the present rate of wages. On the other hand, it does not allow promotion examinations to such positions as matron, instructor in sewing, manual training, etc., which are in the competitive class. But a large percentage of the group of officers should be recruited from the women, who have shown their loyalty to the institution by remaining in its employ at a very low wage, and have also proved their fidelity to their charges, for no woman can remain for any length of time unless she is especially interested in the problem.

What has been said regarding women attendants can be said also of the men, who begin as laborers in the non-competitive class, many of whom by their interest and ability becoming well fitted for more important positions,

but often being prohibited from obtaining them except in competition with people outside who may be able to pass a higher examination than those thoroughly familiar with the work.

Is it not the duty of a manager to understand these conditions and use his influence to improve them? For the Civil Service can and should become of the greatest help and protection.

The state institutions have difficulties also with other departments organized to promote the welfare of the state's unfortunates. The Salary Classification Commission may be cited as an instance. A manager should use his influence to get this Commission always to pay the market price for good labor, and never a rate below the regular one or less than that being paid for similar service in other state departments. He should bring his influence to bear upon the State Architect's office in order to avoid in the future the mistakes of the past, and make it impossible for specifications to call for a fortress where a henhouse is needed, or a second rate structure where a permanent one is indicated. A manager should get the Legislature to make the appropriation fit the required building, rather than force the State Architect to design the building to fit the available appropriation.

In spite of the good intentions of the Fiscal Supervisor, cumbrous machinery continues to throw obstacles in the path of successful administration. A manager should stand for a control so effectual, so simple, and so adequate that a mass of details shall not obscure fundamental issues nor divert attention from the balance sheet to the minute items which make it up.

Every relation between the State Board of Charities and the institutions under its care should be based on the spirit of charity, and the inspectors of the Board should be guided by the Golden Rule. The duties of the managers of our state institutions can become pleasures as well as duties when a closer fellowship and understanding with

every department at Albany has broken down the barriers of formal control.

James Wood, discussing the system of control of our state institutions, has said very pertinently, "The policy of pin pricks is intolerable."

Let us go a step farther and outline, very briefly, the opportunities. And first of all, the opportunity of helping solve the serious problem which is confronting society, namely, how best to care for the state's dependents, is a tremendous one.

Viewing conditions in the distance, as he does, a manager should be able to see more clearly what can be done wisely than almost any other student of the problem. He ought to be in a position to know whether it is expedient to urge the state to provide immediately for the care of all its dependents, or whether it is better that certain groups and grades be under the state's observation; whether, as has been recommended, certain groups of the defective dependents should be operated on to prevent reproduction of their kind; and whether it is wise to place in separate institutions the different groups of the same defect or to gather them together in one. In fact, the great variety of problems that need to be looked at from a distance, and clearly, are presented to the Boards of Managers, and upon their combined judgment the executive and law-making bodies should rely.

In the formative period of an institution the manager has an opportunity to plan wisely and economically for the future, and thus guard against the effects of unwise planning which are obvious in our institutions today.

As a part of such planning comes the insistent, present-day question, to what extent shall research be carried in the institution? Surely a well-equipped and completely manned laboratory for scientific investigation is now an essential in every modern institution. The tendency of the times is to demand that research shall produce immediate results, but the justification for research may not be apparent for years. In these great institutions, our working

laboratories, causes must be studied and ways be found to conserve the normal population from the appalling burden of the dependent, the defective, and the delinquent. Each manager must decide for himself whether the past, the present, or the future is the thing at stake in his institution. And in this connection may I say that all work must be pioneer work if it is to merit respect or be of any permanent value.

A manager stands between the superintendent on one side and the Legislature and the various Boards of control on the other. The title to our state institutions is vested in the people of the state of New York: they are the stockholders; the managers are the trustees; and the superintendents are the chief executive officers. Think of them from this standpoint, and the relation in which they stand respectively becomes clear and definite.

When a manager takes his oath of office a heavy responsibility is assumed. The future alone can tell whether the managers of this and other states live up to their rights, their duties, and their opportunities. Few of us realize how potent an influence a manager can be in the uplift of the race. One of our opportunities is to bring to the inmates of the richness of our experience and our ripened judgment. Our duty to the individual inmate is the opportunity for race conservation. With such appalling problems crying for solution, with such opportunities before us, should we not each and all, whether legislator, state officer, manager, superintendent, or employe, unite in a common cause, which in the last analysis means the protection of your home and mine from the dangers which pauperism, disease, and crime bring in their wake? And poverty, disease, and crime are surely responsible for the existence of the charitable, reformatory, and penal institutions of our state.

A manager's most vital problem is a bigger one than even his relation to his superintendent or any of his twenty masters at Albany. The problem of the manager of a state

hospital is with the insane; the manager of a state institution for the feeble-minded, with the defective; and the manager of a state reformatory, with the criminal. The patient is the problem; to help solve the problem is the opportunity. This can be done by providing the individual inmate with the best that science can suggest and a great state supply in order to care for, to restore, to educate, or reform, as the case may be.

Beyond the rights and the duties lies the wide and significant opportunity to look forward to the day when these great institutions—these monuments to our folly—shall be needed no more. When justice, equality of opportunity, and the common good are vouchsafed to every individual, when the right to be well-born is guaranteed to future generations, then, and not till then, will that day dawn.

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